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ATLANTIC READINGS

NUMBER 3

JUNGLE NIGHT

BY

Charles WILLIAM BEEBE



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Jungle Night

By William Beebe

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WITHIN gun-reach in front of me trudged my little Akawai Indian hunter. He turned his head suddenly, his ears catching some sound which mine had missed, and I saw that his profile was rather like that of Dante. Instantly the thought spread and the simile deepened. Were we two not all alone? and this unearthly hour and light — Then I chuckled softly, but the silence that the chuckle shattered shrank away and made it a loud, coarse sound, so that I involuntarily drew in my breath. But it was really amusing, the thought of Dante setting out on a hunt for kinkajous and giant armadillos. Jeremiah looked at me wonderingly, and we went on in silence. And for the next mile Dante vanished from my thoughts and I mused upon the sturdy little red man. Jeremiah was his civilized name; he would never tell me his real one. It seemed so unsuited to him that I thought up one still less appropriate and called him Nupee — which is the three-

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toed sloth; and in his quiet way he saw the humor of it, for a more agile human being never lived.

Nupee's face was unclouded, but his position as hunter to our expedition had brought decisions and responsibilities which he had not known before. The simple life, — the unruffled existence in the little open *benab*, with hammock, cassava field, and an occasional hunt, — this was of the past. A wife had come, slipping quietly into his life, Indian-fashion; and now, before the baby arrived, decisions had to be made. Nupee longed for some store shoes and a suit of black clothes. He had owned a big *benab* which he himself had built; but a godmother, like the cowbird in a warbler's nest, had gradually but firmly ousted him and had filled it with diseased relatives, so that it was unpleasant to visit. He now, to my knowledge, owned a single shirt and a pair of short trousers.

The shoes were achieved. I detected in him qualities which I knew that I should find in some one, as I do on every expedition, and I made him perform some unnecessary labor and gave him the shoes. But the clothes would cost five dollars, a month's wages, and he had promised to get married — white-fashion — in another month, and that would consume several times five dollars. I did not offer to help him decide. His Akawai marriage ceremony seemed not without honor, and as for its sincerity — I had seen the two together. But my lips were sealed. I could

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not tell him that a recementing of the ritual of his own tribe did not seem quite the equal of a five-dollar suit of clothes. That was a matter for individual decision.

But to-night I think that we both had put all our worries and sorrows far away, and I memory as well; and I felt sympathy in the quiet, pliant gait which carried him so swiftly over the sandy trail. I knew Nupee now for what he was — the one for whom I am always on the lookout, the exceptional one, the super-servant, worthy of friendship as an equal. I had seen his uncle and his cousins. They were Indians, nothing more. Nupee had slipped into the place left vacant for a time by Aladdin, and by Satán and Shimosaka, by Drojak and Trujillo — all exceptional, all faithful, all servants first and then friends. I say 'for a time' — for they all hoped, and I think still hope with me, that we shall meet and travel and camp together again, whether in the Cinghalese thorn-bush, or Himalayan dâks, in Dyak canoes or among the camphor groves of Sakarajama.

Nupee and I had not been thrown together closely. This had proved a static expedition, settled in one place, with no dangers to speak of, no real roughing it, and we met only after each hunting trip. But the magic of a full moon had lured me from my laboratory table, and here we were, we two, plodding junglewards, becoming better acquainted in silence than I have often achieved with much talk.

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It was nearly midnight. We traversed a broad trail of white sand, between lines of saplings of pale-barked rubber trees, flooded, saturated, with milky-gray light. Not a star appeared in the cloudless sky, which, in contrast to the great silver moon-plaque, was blue-black. These open sandy stretches, so recently etched into what had been primitive jungle, were too glowing with light for most of the nocturnal creatures who, in darkness, flew and ran and hunted about in them. And the lovers of twilight were already come and gone. The stage was vacant save for one actor — the nighthawk of the silvery collar, whose eerie *whheeeol* or more leisurely and articulate *who-are-you?* was queried from stump and log. There was in it the same liquid tang, the virile ringing of skates on ice, which enriches the cry of the whip-poor-will in our country lanes.

Where the open trail skirted a hillside we came suddenly upon a great gathering of these goat-suckers, engaged in some strange midnight revel. Usually they roost and hunt and call in solitude, but here at least forty were collected on the white sand within an area of a few yards. We stopped and watched. They were dancing — or, rather, popping, as corn pops in a hopper. One after another, or a half dozen at a time, they bounced up a foot or two from the ground and flopped back, at the instant of leaving and returning uttering a sudden, explosive *wopl*! This they kept up unceasingly for the five minutes we gave to them,

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and our passage interrupted them for only a moment. Later we passed single birds which popped and wopped in solitary state; whether practicing, or snobbishly refusing to perform in public, only they could tell. It was a scene not soon forgotten.

Suddenly before us rose the jungle, raw-edged, with border zone of bleached, ashamed trunks and lofty branches white as chalk, of dead and dying trees. For no jungle tree, however hardy, can withstand the blasting of violent sun after the veiling of emerald foliage is torn away. As the diver plunges beneath the waves, so, after one glance backward over the silvered landscape, I passed at a single stride into what seemed by contrast inky blackness, relieved by the trail ahead, which showed as does a ray of light through closed eyelids. As the chirruping rails climbed among the roots of the tall cat-tails out yonder, so we now crept far beneath the level of the moonlit foliage. The silvery landscape had been shifted one hundred, two hundred feet above the earth. We had become lords of creation in name alone, threading our way humbly among the fungi and toad-stools, able only to look aloft and wonder what it was like. And for a long time no voice answered to tell us whether any creature lived and moved in the tree-tops.

The tropical jungle by day is the most wonderful place in the world. At night I am sure it is the most weirdly beautiful of all places outside

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the world. For it is primarily unearthly, unreal; and at last I came to know why. In the light of the full moon it was rejuvenated. The simile of theatrical scenery was always present to the mind, the illusion lying especially in the completeness of transformation from the jungle by daylight. The theatrical effect was heightened by the sense of being in some vast building. This was due to the complete absence of any breath of air. Not a leaf moved; even the pendulous air-roots reaching down their seventy-foot plummets for the touch of soil did not sway a hair's breadth. The throb of the pulse set the rhythm for one's steps. The silence, for a time, was as perfect as the breathlessness. It was a wonderfully ventilated amphitheatre; the air was as free from any feeling of tropical heat, as it lacked all crispness of the north. It was exactly the temperature of one's skin. Heat and cold were for the moment as unthinkable as wind.

One's body seemed wholly negligible. In soft padding moccasins and easy swinging gait, close behind my Indian hunter, and in such khaki browns that my body was almost invisible to my own downward glance, I was conscious only of the play of my senses: of two at first, sight and smell; later, of hearing. The others did not exist. We two were unattached, impersonal, moving without effort or exertion. It was magic, and I was glad that I had only my Akawai for companion, for it was magic that a word would have

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shattered. Yet there was this wonderfully satisfying thing about it, that most magic lacks: it exists at present, to-day, perhaps, at least once a month, and I know that I shall experience it again. When I go to the window and look out upon the city night, I find all extraneous light emaciated and shattered by the blare of gas and electricity, but from one upreaching tower I can see reflected a sheen which is not generated in any power-house of earth. Then I know that within the twenty-four hours the *terai* jungles of Garhwal, the tree-ferns of Pahang, and the mighty *moras* which now surround us, were standing in silvery silence and in the peace which only the wilderness knows.

I soon took the lead and slackened the pace to a slow walk. Every few minutes we stood motionless, listening with mouth as well as ears. For no one who has not listened in such silence can realize how important the mouth is. Like the gill of old which gave it origin, our ear has still an entrance inward as well as outward, and the sweep of breath and throb of the blood are louder than we ever suspect. When at an opera or concert I see some one sitting rapt, listening with open mouth, I do not think of it as ill-bred. I know it for unconscious and sincere absorption based on an excellent physical reason.

It was early spring in the tropics; insect life was still in the gourmand stage, or that of pupal sleep. The final period of pipe and fiddle had

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not yet arrived, so that there was no hum from the underworld. The flow of sap and the spread of petals were no less silent than the myriad creatures which, I knew, slumbered or hunted on every side. It was as if I had slipped back one dimension in space and walked in a shadow world. But these shadows were not all colorless. Although the light was strained almost barren by the moon mountains, yet the glow from the distant lava and craters still kept something of color, and the green of the leaves, great and small, showed as a rich dark olive. The afternoon's rain had left each one filmed with clear water, and this struck back the light as polished silver. There was no tempered illumination. The trail ahead was either black, or a solid sheet of light. Here and there in the jungle on each side, where a tree had fallen, or a flue of clear space led moonwards, the effect was of cold electric light seen through trees in city parks. When such a shaft struck down upon us, it surpassed simile. I have seen old paintings in Belgian cathedrals of celestial light which now seems less imaginary.

At last the silence was broken, and like the first breath of the trade-wind which clouds the Mazaruni surface, the mirror of silence was never quite clear again—or so it seemed. My northern mind, stored with sounds of memory, never instinctively accepted a new voice of the jungle for what it was. Each had to go through a reference clearing-house of sorts. It was like the

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psychological reaction to words or phrases. Any strange wail or scream striking suddenly upon my ear instantly crystallized some vision of the past — some circumstance or adventure fraught with similar sound. Then, appreciably as a second thought, came the keen concentration of every sense to identify this new sound, to hear it again, to fix it in mind with its character and its meaning. Perhaps at some distant place and time, in utterly incongruous surroundings, it may in turn flash into consciousness — a memory-simile stimulated by some sound of the future.

II

I stood in a patch of moonlight listening to the baying of a hound—or so I thought: that musical ululation which links man's companion wolf-wards. Then I thought of the packs of wild hunting dogs, the dreaded 'warracabra tigers,' and I turned to the Indian at my elbow, full of hopeful expectation. With his quiet smile he whispered, 'Kunama,' and I knew I had heard the giant tree-frog of Guiana — a frog of size and voice well in keeping with these mighty jungles. I knew these were powerful *beenas* with the Indians, tokens of good hunting, and every fortunate *benab* would have its dried mummy frog hung up with the tail of the giant armadillo and other charms. Well might these batrachians arouse profound emotions among the Indians, familiar as they are with the strange beings of the forest.

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I could imagine the great goggle-eyed fellow sprawled high near the roof of the jungle, clutching the leaves with his vacuum-cupped toes. The moonlight would make him ghostly — a pastel frog; but in the day he flaunted splashes of azure and green on his scarlet body.

At a turn in the trail we squatted and waited for what the jungle might send of sight or sound. And in whispers Nupee told me of the big frog *kunama*, and its ways. It never came to the ground, or even descended part way down the trees; and by some unknown method of distillation it made little pools of its own in deep hollows, and there lived. And this water was thick like honey and white like milk, and when stirred became reddish. Besides which, it was very bitter. If a man drank of it, forever after he hopped each night and clasped all the trees which he encountered, endlessly endeavoring to ascend them and always failing. And yet, if he could once manage to reach a pool of *kunama* water in an uncut tree and drink, his manhood would return and his mind be healed.

When the Indians desired this *beena*, they marked a tree whence a frog called at night, and in the daytime cut it down. Forming a big circle, they searched and found the frog, and forthwith smoked it and rubbed it on arrows and bow before they went out. I listened gravely and found that it all fitted in with the magic of the night.

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If an Indian had appeared down the trail, hopping endlessly and gripping the trunks, gazing upward with staring eyes, I should not have thought it more strange than the next thing that really happened.

We had settled on our toes in another squatting-place — a dark aisle with only scattered flecks of light. The silence and breathlessness of the moon-craters could have been no more complete than that which enveloped us. My eye wandered from spot to spot, when suddenly I began to think of that great owl-like goatsucker, the 'poor-me-one.' We had shot one at Kalacoon a month before and no others had called since, and I had not thought of the species again. Quite without reason I began to think of the bird, of its wonderful markings, of the eyes which years ago in Trinidad I had made to glow like iridescent globes in the light of a flash — and then a poor-me-one called behind us, not fifty feet away. Even this did not seem strange among these surroundings. It was an interesting happening, one which I have experienced many times in my life. It may have been just another coincidence. I am quite certain it was not. In any event it was a Dantesque touch, emphasized by the character of the call — the wail of a lost soul being as good a simile as any other. It started as a high, trembling wail, the final cry being lost in the depths of whispered woe: —

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Oo—————ooh!
 oh!
 oh!
 oh!
 oh!
 oh!

Nupée never moved; only his lips formed the name by which he knew it — *kalaruoe*. Whatever else characterized the sounds of the jungle at night, none became monotonous or common. Five minutes later the great bird called to us from far, far away, as if from another round of purgatory — an eerie lure to enter still deeper into the jungle depths. We never heard it again.

Nature seems to have apportioned the voices of many of her creatures with sensitive regard for their environment. Sombre voices seem fittingly to be associated with subdued light, and joyous notes with the blaze of sunlit twigs and open meadows. A bobolink's bubbling carol is unthinkable in a jungle, and the strain of a wood pewee on a sunny hillside would be like an organ playing dance-music. This is even more pronounced in the tropics, where, quite aside from any mental association on my part, the voices and calls of the jungle reflect the qualities of that twilight world. The poor-me-one proves too much. He is the very essence of night, his wings edged with velvet silence, his plumage the mingled concentration of moss and lichens and dead wood.

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I was about to rise and lead Nupee still farther into the gloom when the jungle showed another mood — a silent whimsy, the humor of which I could not share with the little red man. Close to my face, so near that it startled me for a moment, over the curved length of a long, narrow caladium leaf, there came suddenly two brilliant lights. Steadily they moved onward, coming up into view for all the world like two tiny headlights of a motor-car. They passed, and the broadside view of this great elater was still absurdly like the profile of a miniature tonneau with the top down. I laughingly thought to myself how perfect the illusion would be if a red tail-light should be shown, when to my amazement a rosy red light flashed out behind, and my bewildered eyes all but distinguished a number! Naught but a tropical forest could present such contrasts in such rapid succession as the poor-me-one and this parody of man's invention.

I captured the big beetle and slid him into a vial, where in his disgust he clicked sharply against the glass. The vial went into my pocket and we picked up our guns and crept on. As we traversed a dark patch, dull gleams like heat lightning flashed over the leaves, and, looking down, I saw that my khaki was aglow from the illuminated insect within. This betrayed every motion, so I wrapped the vial in several sheets of paper and rolled it up in my handkerchief. The glow was duller but almost as penetrating. At one

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time or another I have had to make use of all my garments, from topee to moccasins, in order to confine captives armed with stings, beaks, teeth, or fangs, but now I was at a complete loss. I tried a gun-barrel with a handkerchief stopper, and found that I now carried an excellent, long-handled flashlight. Besides, I might have sudden use for the normal function of the gun. I had nothing sufficiently opaque to quench those flaring headlights, and I had to own myself beaten and release him. He spread his wings and flew swiftly away, his red light glowing derisively; and even in the flood of pure moonlight he moved within an aura which carried far through the jungle. I knew that killing him was of no use, for a week after death from chloroform I have seen the entire interior of a large insect box brilliantly lighted by the glow of these wonderful candles, still burning on the dead shoulders of the same kind of insect.

Twice, deeper in the jungle, we squatted and listened, and twice the silence remained unbroken and the air unmoved. Happening to look up through a lofty, narrow canyon of dark foliage, I was startled as by some sudden sound by seeing a pure white cloud, moon-lit, low down, pass rapidly across. It was first astounding, then unreal: a bit of exceedingly poor work on the part of the property man, who had mixed the hurricane scenery with that of the dog-days. Even the elements seemed to have been laved with magic. The zone of high wind, with its swift-flying clouds, must

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have been flowing like a river just above the motionless foliage of the tree-tops.

This piece of ultra-unnaturalism seemed to break part of the spell and the magic silence was lifted. Two frogs boomed again, close at hand, and now all the hound similitude was gone, and in its place another, still more strange, when we think of the goggle-eyed author far up in the trees. The sound now was identical with the short cough or growl of a hungry lion, and though I have heard the frogs many times since that night, this resemblance never changed or weakened. It seemed as if the volume, the roaring outburst, could come only from the throat of some large, full-lunged mammal.

A sudden tearing rush from the trail-side, and ripping of vines and shrubs, was mingled with deep, hoarse snorts, and we knew that we had disturbed one of the big red deer — big only in comparison with the common tiny brown brockets. A few yards farther the leaves rustled high overhead, although no breath of wind had as yet touched the jungle. I began a slow, careful search with my flashlight, and, mingled with the splotches and specks of moonlight high overhead, I seemed to see scores of little eyes peering down. But at last my faint electric beam found its mark and evolved the first bit of real color which the jungle had shown — always excepting the ruby tail-light. Two tiny red globes gleamed down at us, and as they gleamed, moved without a sound,

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apparently unattached, slowly through the foliage. Then came a voice, as wandering, as impersonal as the eyes — a sharp, incisive *whreeeeeat!* with a cat-like timbre; and from the eyes and voice I reconstructed a night monkey — a kin-kajou.

Then another notch was slipped and the jungle for a time showed something of the exuberance of its life. A paca leaped from its meal of nuts and bounced away with quick, repeated pats; a beetle with wings tuned to the bass clef droned by; some giant tree-cricket tore the remaining intervals of silence to shreds with unmuted wing-fiddles, *cricks* so shrill and high that they well-nigh passed beyond the upper register of my ear out into silence again. The roar of another frog was comforting to my ear-drum.

Then silence descended again, and hours passed in our search for sound or smell of the animal we wished chiefest to find — the giant armadillo. These rare beings have a distinct odor. Months of work in the open had sharpened my nostrils so that on such a tramp as this they were not much inferior to those of Nupee. This sense gave me as keen pleasure as eye or ear, and furnished quite as much information. The odors of city and civilization seemed very far away: gasoline, paint, smoke, perfumery, leather — all these could hardly be recalled. And how absurd seemed society's unwritten taboo on discussion of this admirable but pitifully degenerate sense! Why may you

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look at your friend's books, touch his collection of *netsukés*, listen to his music, yet dare sniff at naught but his blossoms!

In the open spaces of the earth, and more than anywhere in this conservatory of unblown odors, we come more and more to appreciate and envy a dog's sensitive muzzle. Here we sniffed as naturally as we turned ear, and were able to recognize many of our nasal impressions, and even to follow a particularly strong scent to its source. Few yards of trail but had their distinguishable scent, whether violent, acrid smell or delectable fragrance. Long after a crab-jackal had passed, we noted the stinging, bitter taint in the air; and now and then the pungent wake of some big jungle-bug struck us like a tangible barrier.

The most tantalizing odors were the wonderfully delicate and penetrating ones from some great burst of blossoms, odors heavy with sweetness, which seeped down from vine or tree high overhead, wholly invisible from below even in broad daylight. These odors remained longest in memory, perhaps because they were so completely the product of a single sense. There were others too, which were unforgettable, because, like the voice of the frog, they stirred the memory a fraction before they excited curiosity. Such I found the powerful musk from the bed of leaves which a fawn had just left. For some reason this brought vividly to mind the fearful compound of smells arising from the decks of Chinese junks.

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III

Along the moonlit trail there came wavering whiffs of orchids, ranging from attar of roses and carnations to the pungence of carrion, the latter doubtless distilled from as delicate and as beautiful blossoms as the former. There were, besides, the myriad and bewildering smells of sap, crushed leaves, and decaying wood; acrid, sweet, spicy, and suffocating, some like musty books, others recalling the paint on the Noah's Ark of one's nursery.

But the scent of the giant armadillo eluded us. When we waded through some new, strange odor I looked back at Nupee, hoping for some sign that it was the one we sought. But that night the great armored creatures went their way and we ours, and the two did not cross. Nupee showed me a track at the trail-side made long ago, as wide and deep as the spoor of a dinosaur, and I fingered it reverently as I would have touched the imprint of a recently alighted pterodactyl, taking care not to spoil the outlines of the huge claw-marks. All my search for him had been in vain thus far, though I had been so close upon his trail as to have seen fresh blood. I had made up my mind not to give up, but it seemed as if success must wait for another year.

We watched and called the ghostly kinkajous and held them fascinated with our stream of light; we aroused unnamable creatures which squawked

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companionably at us and rustled the tree-top leaves; we listened to the whispered rush of passing vampires skimming our faces and were soothed by the hypnotic droning hum which beetles left in their swift wake. Finally we turned and circled through side trails so narrow and so dark that we walked with outstretched arms, feeling for the trunks and lianas, choosing a sloth's gait and the hope of new adventures rather than the glare of my flash on our path.

When we entered Kalacoon trail, we headed toward home. Within sight of the first turn a great black branch of a tree had recently fallen across the trail in a patch of moonlight. Before we reached it, the branch had done something it should not have done — it had straightened slightly. We strained our eyes to the utmost but could not, in this eerie light, tell head from tail end of this great serpent. It moved very slowly, and with a motion which perfectly confounded our perception. Its progress seemed no faster than the hour hand of a watch, but we knew that it moved, yet so close to the white sand that the whole trail seemed to move with it. The eye refused to admit any motion except in sudden shifts, like widely separated films of a motion-picture. For minute after minute it seemed quiescent; then we would blink and realize that it was too feet higher up the bank. One thing we could see — a great thickening near the centre of the snake: it had fed recently and to repletion, and slowly

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it was making its way to some hidden lair, perhaps to lie motionless until another moon should silver the jungle. Was there any stranger life in the world?

Whether it was a giant bushmaster or a constrictor, we could not tell in the diffused light. I allowed it to go unharmed, for the spell of silence and the jungle night was too strongly woven to be shattered again by the crash of gun or rifle. Nupee had been quite willing to remain behind, and now, as so often with my savage friends, he looked at me wonderingly. He did not understand and I could not explain. We were at one in the enjoyment of direct phenomena; we could have passed months of intimate companionship in the wilds as I had done with his predecessors; but at the touch of abstract things, of letting a deadly creature live for any reason except for lack of a gun — then they looked at me always with that puzzled look, that straining to grasp the something which they knew must be there. And at once always followed instant acceptance, unquestioning, without protest. The transition was smooth, direct, complete: the sahib had had opportunity to shoot; he had not done so; what did the sahib wish to do now — to squat longer or to go on?

We waited for many minutes at the edge of a small glade, and the event which seemed most significant to me was in actual spectacle one of the last of the night's happenings. I sat with chin on

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knees, coolie-fashion — a position which, when once mastered, and with muscles trained to withstand the unusual flexion for hour after hour, is one of the most valuable assets of the wilderness lover and the watcher of wild things. It enables one to spend long periods of time in the lowest of umbrella tents, or to rest on wet ground or sharp stones where actual sitting down would be impossible. Thus is one insulated from *bêtes rouges* and enthusiastic ants whose sole motto is eternal preparedness. Thus too one slips, as it were, under the visual guard of human-shy creatures, whose eyes are on the lookout for their enemy at human height. From such a position, a single upward leap prepares one instantly for advance or retreat, either of which manœuvres is well within instant necessity at times. Then there were always the two positions to which one could change if occasion required — flat-footed, with arm-pits on knees, or on the balls of the feet with elbows on knees. Thus is every muscle shifted and relaxed.

Squatting is one of the many things which a white man may learn from watching his *shikarees* and guides, and which, in the wilderness, he may adopt without losing caste. We are a chair-ridden people, and dare hardly even cross our knees in public. Yet how many of us delight in sitting Buddha-fashion, or as near to it as we can attain, when the ban of society is lifted! A chairless people, however, does not necessarily mean a more simple, primitive type. The Japanese meth-

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od of sitting is infinitely more difficult and complex than ours. The characters of our weak-thighed, neolithic forbears are as yet too pronounced in our own bodies for us to keep an upright position for long. Witness the admirable admittance of this anthropological fact by the architects of our subway cars, who know that only a tithe of their patrons will be fortunate enough to find room on the cane-barked seats which have come to take the place of the stumps and fallen logs of a hundred thousand years ago. So they have thoughtfully strung the upper reaches of the cars with imitation branches and swaying lianas, to which the last-comers cling jealously, and swing with more or less of the grace of their distant forbears. Their fur, to be sure, is rubbed thinner; nuts and fruits have given place to newspapers and novels, and the roar and odors are not those of the wind among the leaves and blossoms. But the simile is amusing enough to end abruptly, and permit individual imagination to complete it.

When I see an overtired waiter or clerk swaying from foot to foot like a rocking elephant, I sometimes place the blame further back than immediate impatience for the striking of the closing hour. It were more true to blame the gentlemen whose habits were formed before caste, whose activities preceded speech.

We may be certain that chairs will never go out of fashion. We are at the end of bodily evolution

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in that direction. But to see a white-draped, lanky Hindu, or a red-cloaked lama of the hills, quietly fold up, no matter where he may be, is to witness the perfection of chairless rest. One can read or write or doze comfortably, swaying slightly with a bird's unconscious balance, or, as in my case at present, wholly disarm suspicion on the part of the wild creatures by sinking from the height of a man to that of a jungle deer. And still I had lost nothing of the insulation which my moccasins provided from all the inconveniences of the forest floor. Looking at Nupee after this rush of chaotic thoughts which came between jungle happenings, I chuckled as I hugged my knees, for I knew that Nupee had noticed and silently considered my little accomplishment, and that he approved, and I knew that I had acquired merit in his sight. Thus may we revel in the approval of our super-servants, but they must never know it.

From this eulogy of squatting, my mind returned to the white light of the glade. I watched the motionless leaves about me, many of them drooping and rich maroon by daylight, for they were just unbudded. Reaching far into the dark mystery of the upper jungle stretched the air-roots, held so straight by gravity, so unheeding of the whirling of the planet through space. Only one mighty liana — a monkey-ladder — had revolted against this dominance of the earth's pull and writhed and looped upon itself in fantastic

JUNGLE NIGHT

whorls, while along its length rippled ever the undulations which mark this uneasy growth, this crystallized Saint Vitus plant.

A momentary shiver of leaves drew our eyes to the left, and we began to destroy the optical images evolved by the moon-shadows and to seek the small reality which we knew lived and breathed somewhere on that long branch. Then a sharp crack like a rifle lost whatever it was to us forever, and we half leaped to our feet as something swept downward through the air and crashed length after length among the plants and fallen logs. The branches overhead rocked to and fro, and for many minutes, like the aftermath of a volcanic eruption, came a shower, first of twigs and swirling leaves, then of finer particles, and lastly of motes which gleamed like silver dust as they sifted down to the trail. When the air cleared I saw that the monkey-ladder had vanished and I knew that its yards upon yards of length lay coiled and crushed among the ferns and sprouting palms of the jungle floor. It seemed most fitting that the vegetable kingdom, whose silence and majesty gave to the jungle night its magic qualities, should have contributed this memorable climax.

Long before the first Spaniard sailed up the neighboring river, the monkey-ladder had thrown its spirals aloft, and through all the centuries, all the years, it had seen no change wrought beneath it. The animal trail was trod now and then by Indian hunters, and lately we had passed several

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times. The sound of our guns was less than the crashing fall of an occasional forest tree. Now, with not a leaf moved by the air, with only the two of us squatting in the moonlight for audience, the last cell had given way. The sap could no longer fight the decay which had entered its heart; and at the appointed moment, the moment set by the culmination of a greater nexus of forces than our human mind could ever hope to grasp, the last fibre parted and the massive growth fell.

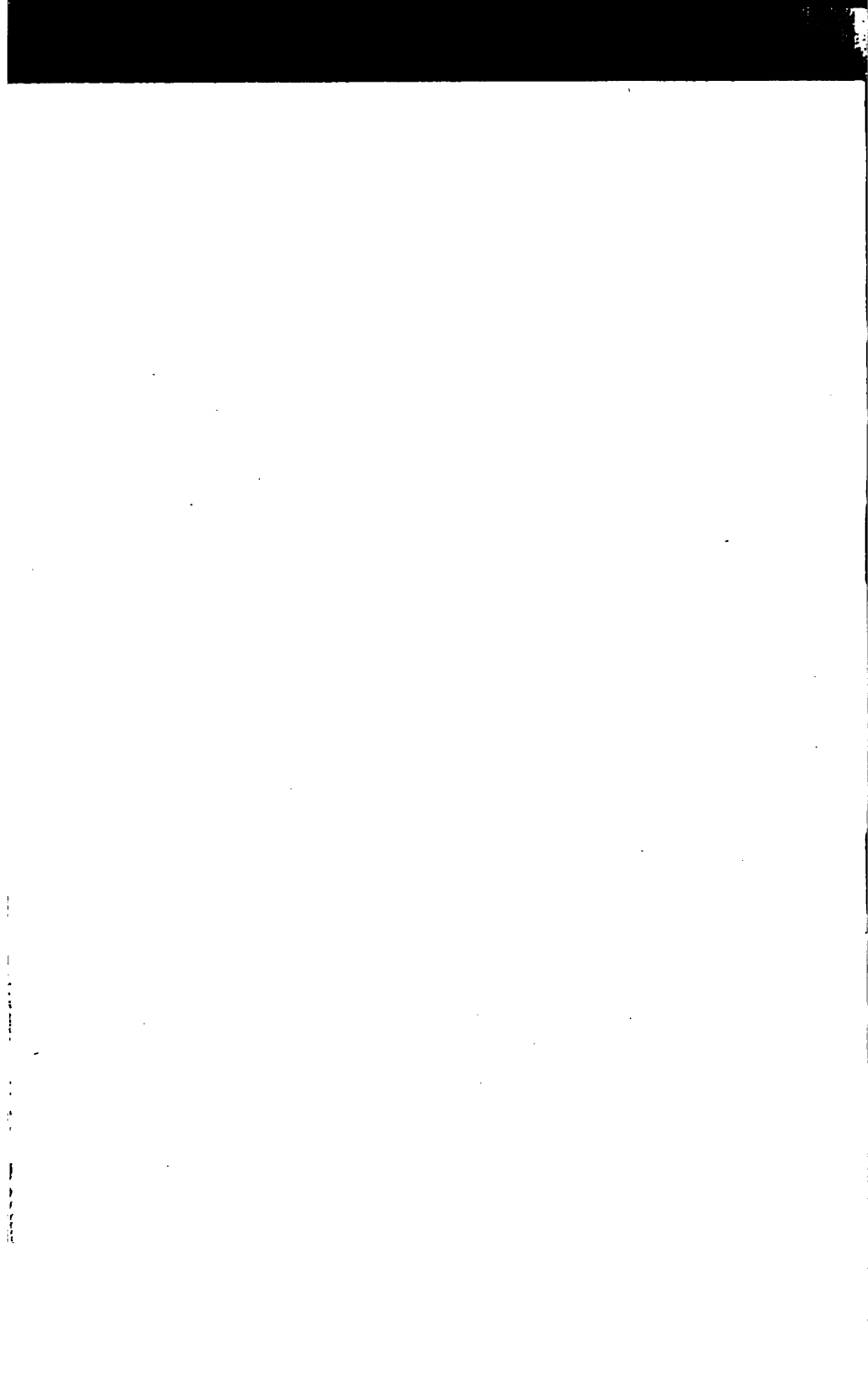
In the last few minutes, as it hung suspended, gracefully spiraled in the moonlight, it had seemed as perfect as the new-sprouted *moras* at my feet. As I slowly walked out of the jungle I saw in this the explanation of the simile of artificial scenery, of all the strange magic which had come to me as I entered. The alchemy of moonlight turned all the jungle to perfect growth, growth at rest. In the silvery light was no trace of gnawing worm, of ravening ant, or corroding fungus. The jungle was rejuvenated and made a place more wonderful than any fairyland of which I have read or which I have conceived. The jungle by day, as I have said — that, too, is wonderful. We may have two friends, quite unlike in character, whom we love each for his own personality, and yet it would be a hideous, an unthinkable thing to see one transformed into the other.

So, with the mist settling down and tarnishing the great plaque of silver, I left the jungle, glad

JUNGLE NIGHT

that I could be far away before the first hint of dawn came to mar the magic. Thus in memory I can keep the dawn away until I return.

And sometime in the future, when the lure of the full moon comes, and I answer, I shall be certain of finding the same silence, the same wonderful light, and the waiting trees and the magic. But Nupee may not be there. He will perhaps have slipped into memory, with Drojak and Aladdin. And if I find no one as silently friendly as Nupee, I shall have to watch alone through my jungle night.



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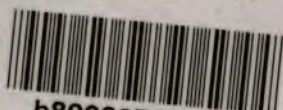
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